

has responded to the Obama administration in the same ways it did to the Bush administration before the “reset.” Moscow has been playing this game for years. It has sold the same rug many times. The only thing that has changed is the price the United States has been willing to pay.

As anyone who ever shopped for a rug knows, the more you pay for it, the more valuable it seems. The Obama administration has paid a lot. In exchange for Russian cooperation, President Obama has killed the Bush administration’s planned missile defense installations in Poland and the Czech Republic. Obama has officially declared that Russia’s continued illegal military occupation of Georgia is no “obstacle” to U.S.-Russian civilian nuclear cooperation. The recent deal between Russia and Ukraine granting Russia control of a Crimean naval base through 2042 was shrugged off by Obama officials, as have been Putin’s suggestions for merging Russian and Ukrainian industries in a blatant bid to undermine Ukrainian sovereignty.

So at least one effect of the administration’s “reset” has been to produce a wave of insecurity throughout Eastern and Central Europe and the Baltics, where people are starting to fear they can no longer count on the United States to protect them from an expansive Russia. And for this the administration has gotten what? Yet another hollow U.N. Security Council resolution. Some observers suggest that Iran’s leaders are quaking in their boots, confronted by this great unity of the international “community.” More likely, they are laughing up their sleeves—along with the men in Moscow.

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HONORING OUR ARMED FORCES

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I wish to acknowledge Memorial Day, which provides us with an opportunity to take time out from our busy lives to remember and honor those men and women who have made the ultimate sacrifice to protect the United States and the liberties we hold dear.

Mississippians have a strong affinity for our national defense, with thousands of brave citizens volunteering to serve in the Armed Forces. We also understand that, unfortunately, we will lose loved ones as part of that dedication.

The very first Memorial Day, originally known as Decoration Day, was observed in 1868 by decorating the graves of Civil War soldiers, and since then Americans have set aside a time each year to honor their fallen heroes.

Columbus, MS, proudly claims to be the birthplace of this tradition, but Memorial Day wasn’t officially established as a Federal holiday until 1971. In the nearly 234 years since we became an independent nation, Americans have fought in numerous wars, and many have given their lives in defense of the ideals that the United States represents.

As we gather this year to commemorate Memorial Day, we can reflect on all of the Mississippians who have perished protecting our Nation, whether in battles long ago or in the ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Since the start of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom almost 10 years ago, more than 70 members of the Armed Forces with close ties to Mississippi have died fighting in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Since Memorial Day last year, nine Mississippi soldiers have died while serving the American people. Those valiant men include LCpl. Philip P. Clark, 19, of Brandon, died May 18, 2010; SGT Anthony O. Magee, 29, of Hattiesburg, died April 27, 2010; Army PFC Anthony Blount, 21, of Petal, died April 7, 2010; SSG William S. Ricketts, 27, of Corinth, died Feb 27, 2010; SFC Christopher D. Shaw, 26, of Natchez, died Sept. 29, 2009; SGT Matthew L. Ingram, 25, of Newton, died Aug. 21, 2009; and SFC Alejandro Granado, 42, of Fairfax, Va., died Aug. 2, 2009. Mississippi Guard; SFC Severin W. Summers III, 43, of Bentonla, died Aug. 2, 2009; and Army SSG Johnny Roosevelt Polk, 39, of Gulfport, died July 31, 2009.

I honor them, and my heart goes out to the families of all the brave Mississippi men and women in uniform who have died for our country. It is the endless support of families that motivates our service men and women to carry out their duties, and their dedication must not be forgotten this Memorial Day.

Congress is working diligently to provide our troops in Afghanistan with the funds necessary to finish the job and come home safely. I understand the necessity of matching our soldiers’ readiness with the means to complete their mission, and I am confident that the entire Mississippi delegation and Congress continue to take that duty very seriously.

As a veteran of the U.S. Navy, I am particularly thankful for the bravery and dedication of those who have fought and died for our country in our defense. We are blessed to live in a country that protects its citizens with such a fine, fighting force.

This Memorial Day, I encourage everyone to take a moment to remember the courageous American soldiers who have given their lives for our Nation and to thank their families. Our fallen warriors are true heroes, and we owe them our solemn gratitude for their service and sacrifice.

MEMORIAL DAY

Mr. President, next week our Nation will observe Memorial Day, an occasion on which we honor the men and women who gave this country what President Lincoln called “the last, full measure of devotion”—their very lives. President Lincoln uttered those now timeless words at a ceremony honoring thousands of Civil War troops who fell in a battle surrounding a small town called Gettysburg. To this day, his words reflect, with unparalleled clarity, the heroic sacrifices that made, and have kept, this country safe and free. This Memorial Day we once again honor those men and women.

How do we properly honor those who gave their lives while in military service? Lincoln answered that question—“We honor them by dedicating ourselves to the cause for which they gave themselves. We honor those who died by ensuring, in Lincoln’s words, that they “shall not have died in vain.” We carry on, we remember them, and we remember to tend to their comrades and their families who live among us still.

The Senate’s role in this important task, to honor veterans and their family members with the care and benefits they have earned, falls in part to the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs. I have had the honor of serving on that committee for 20 years, most recently as its Chairman. In that capacity, I am pleased to report on the progress Congress has made since last Memorial Day.

Last Memorial Day, Congress had good reason to be proud when looking back at recent gains for veterans and their families. Since 2007, we have passed historic appropriations bills to properly fund VA, following years of drastic underfunding. We passed the most substantive GI bill since World War II, which has already been put to use by hundreds of thousands of Americans. And we made wide-ranging reforms to the Department of Veterans Affairs—overhauling its mental health care and suicide prevention programs, and enhancing cooperation and collaboration between the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs.

This Memorial Day, we can be proud of having done even more to help VA adapt to the needs of today’s veterans and their families. I will focus on two of the most significant bills—one which reformed the broken funding process for veterans’ health care, and the other, which charts a course for VA where the needs of women veterans and family caregivers receive special attention.

When I became chairman of the committee, the VA health care system had endured many years of chronic underfunding, leading to health care rationing and budget shortfalls. While we succeeded in restoring VA’s budget to appropriate levels, we still had not addressed the underlying funding process—a one-year-at-a-time appropriations process that led to funding delays in 20 of the last 23 years. To fix this broken system, I introduced the Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act. This bill was designed to take the process of advance appropriations—funding a program one year ahead of the regular appropriations process—and apply it to the Nation’s largest health care system. At this time last year, that bill was still pending in Congress. Since then, our colleagues overwhelmingly chose to support this legislation, and the President signed it into law. This change will be felt in every State of the Union. At the one thousand-plus points of care run by VA, administrators will know